

The House of Representatives voted Wednesday to grant wilderness status to two million acres of public land in nine states from California to West Virginia, the largest expansion of protected national wild lands in 15 years.

The Omnibus Public Land Management Act, which has already been passed by the Senate and is expected to be signed by [President Obama](#), was approved in the House by a 285-to-140 vote. Representative [Mary Bono Mack](#), Republican of California, the state with the largest chunk of newly protected land — 700,000 acres — called the legislation “incredibly important.”

“It gives higher protection to environmentally sensitive, outright beautiful lands that deserve protection,” Ms. Bono Mack said. She was one of 38 Republicans voting in favor.

The bill, an amalgam of more than 160 proposals, expands the nation’s protected wilderness areas, which receive the highest level of protection from development, vehicles and commercial activities like logging and drilling, to 109 million acres.

Among the wild lands winning protection are 470,000 acres in the Eastern Sierra and San Gabriel Mountains in California, 517,000 acres in the Canyonlands in Idaho and 11,700 acres of Lake Superior shoreline in northern Michigan. The legislation also shields 1.2 million acres of the Wyoming Range, a hunting ground that is home to half of Wyoming’s moose population, from oil and gas drilling.

It also protects more than 1,000 miles of scenic rivers and streams from commercial development and creates new conservation areas and national parks, including two in New Jersey: the Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park and the [Thomas Edison](#) National Historical Park in West Orange.

The bill’s passage caps years of negotiations among federal, state and local officials, environmental groups and individuals. It drew bipartisan support but had failed by two votes in the House only two weeks ago. (On March 11, House lawmakers sought two-thirds approval with the goal of forestalling amendments. This time it passed by a simple majority.)

The bill was opposed by members like Representative Marsha Blackburn, Republican of Tennessee, who was concerned about placing eight million acres of land off limits to oil and gas exploration.

Representative John Campbell, Republican of California, who also voted against the bill, said in a statement that “the bill that was finally presented to the House also failed to restrict wasteful pork projects.”

Yet the measure’s most controversial provision was for an airport access road through a wildlife refuge in Alaska. That was revised to give the secretary of the interior the power to veto the route if it posed a risk of unacceptable environmental harm. (Environmentalists still oppose the road as inappropriate for a wilderness area and a danger to migratory birds.)

In addition to California, Idaho, Michigan, West Virginia and Wyoming, the states in which more wilderness will be designated are Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon and Utah.

Aside from protecting wilderness, supporters of the bill said it would yield economic benefits because those areas would attract more recreational users for pursuits like hiking, camping and fishing and hunting.

Senator [Barbara Boxer](#), Democrat of California, estimated that the 700,000 acres of new protected land in the state would create at least 400 permanent jobs and bring millions of dollars in tourism.

“People are going to want to come and see these wonders of nature,” Ms. Boxer said. “California is defined by its environment, and this means that we’re going to have a percentage of land in the state that’s preserved in its original character. I couldn’t be more thrilled.”

Paul Spitler, an associate director with the Wilderness Society, said: “In bad times as in good times, Americans still need natural landscapes they can enjoy for the scenic beauty and for

recreation. This is one of the most important wilderness bills Congress has ever considered, and it will leave a lasting legacy for future generations.”

It is the largest amount of acreage to be added to the preservation system since 1994, when Congress designated six million acres of the Southern California desert as protected wilderness.